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# House Guts Two of Carter's Proposed Wiretap Law Alterations

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The House defeated key portions of President Carter's proposed wiretapping law last night, saying that a court order for all domestic surveillance would threaten all U.S. counterintelligence.

Despite personal lobbying efforts by Carter and Attorney General Griffin B. Bell, the House accepted two amendments gutting the bill—one, by a 178-to-176 vote, to free foreign governments or foreign agents from the warrant rules, and the second, by a 224-to-103 vote, to eliminate the special court that would issue warrants for national security surveillance in the United States.

Currently, the president can order any wiretaps or electronic surveillance in "national security" cases.

As the bill stood yesterday, surveillance of foreign agents would remain the responsibility of the president, while surveillance of U.S. citizens would need a warrant issued by a regular federal judge.

Carter's proposals would have required court warrants for all foreign intelligence surveillance and created a special court in Washington to issue them. The Senate passed such a bill, 95 to 1, in April.

Rep. Allen E. Urtel, (D-Pa.) attacked it, saying such a court would be a target for enemy spies. "My major objection is that it would concentrate in one point all counterintelligence activity," he said. "If penetrated by any other operation in the world it would have complete knowledge of the entire counterintelligence operation."

The House is expected to cast a final vote on the bill today.

As the House began debating, both Carter and Bell issued last-minute statements in support of its position.

"I think it will give the public a great deal more confidence in our foreign intelligence system, which necessarily has some mystique to it," Bell told a news conference.

"You can't tell everybody what it is, so people wonder what it is. I think the more safeguards you have in the system the better."

Carter, in a statement issued at the White House, called the bill "one of the most significant legislative initiatives involving our intelligence agencies in the last three decades."

"American citizens will be assured that the intelligence agencies so vital to protecting our security will be able to perform their tasks and effectively," Carter said.

Bell said the bill is aimed at protecting individual civil rights and ending abuses of the past by limiting wiretaps to foreign espionage matters, and by making it easier for federal agents to investigate such cases.

Bell said that if the bill had been law 10 years ago, former FBI director L. Patrick Gray and two of his top aides never would have faced a criminal trial this fall, and some 60 past and present agents would not be facing possible discipline for carrying out illegal wiretaps.

Bell said that if Congress fails to pass the bill "then we're back where we started—arguing about what the law is."